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TAGS: PHUM KDEM PGOV AJ
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION MUSAVAT PARTY TO TAKE PARLIAMENTARY MANDATES, PARTICIPATE IN RERUNS

Classified By: DCM JASON P. HYLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

¶1. (SBU) On February 5 a conference of the members of opposition Musavat Party decided to allow its MPs elected on November 6 to take up their mandates and to allow its members to participate in the May 13 rerun elections of ten canceled constituencies. Musavat, as a member of the Azadliq Bloc, won four out of 125 seats in the November parliamentary election (three candidates from the election bloc and one Musavat member who ran on his own). Musavat has yet to declare its candidates for the May rerun elections, but Musavat candidates such as Arif Hajili and Rauf Arifoglu (who had run in the November races) have already stated their interest in participating. Musavat Chairman Isa Gambar made clear in his remarks that this decision should not be seen as legitimating the Parliament or the elections, but was rather a decision in the best interest of the party. Deputy Chairman Vurgun Eyyub on February 4 called on all parties calling themselves &opposition8 to participate in the rerun elections.

¶2. (SBU) Neither Popular Front Party (PFP) nor the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP), the other two major parties constituting the Azadliq Bloc, have made formal decisions on allowing elected MPs to take their mandates or participatinge in the reruns. One member of PFP was elected, Jamil Hasanli, but he has not taken steps to either take or reject his seat. ADP did not win any parliamentary mandates. While the in-country leaders of both parties (Ali Kerimli and Sardar Jalaloglu, respectively) ran in districts that were canceled either by the Central Election Commission or the Constitutional Court, it appears likely that both parties will boycott the reruns. Only Lala Shovket, leader of the Liberal Party and de-facto member of the leadership of Azadliq Bloc, has formally renounced her seat and tated that her party will not participate in thereruns.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OPPOSITION UNITY

¶3. (SBU) Musavat,s decision, while not unexpected, will likely strain relations (at best) within the Azadliq Bloc and will probably signal the demise of the bloc. The leadership of PFP has publicly and privately rejected the idea of participating in the rerun elections and of allowing any of its members to participate in the Parliament. While PFP Deputy Chairman Fuad Mustafayev told PolOff on February 2 that Azadliq would continue with or without Musavat, the bloc will inevitably lose its strength without one of the major three opposition parties.

¶4. (C) Musavat is playing its strategy well vis--vis the international community: both the Council of Europe and the USG have publicly urged the opposition to take the mandates it won and to compete for more Parliamentary mandates. Gambar is clearly interested in currying more favor with the

international community. However, Gambar,s decision may have more to do with the intrigue surrounding the 2000 Parliamentary elections when the opposition parties announced a boycott, which PFP later unilaterally broke (amid rumors of backroom deal-making). Gambar may have decided ultimately it was safer to make his own decision (and whatever backroom deals may have been conducted to influence his decision) than to cast his lot so strongly with Kerimli again. Regardless of the reason, it appears that the brief election hiatus of opposition party bickering is quickly drawing to a close.
HARNISH